

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
SSM-03 /068 W
-----015661 310606Z /13

R 302047Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9711
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
USMISSION SINAI
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 13873

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT EG
SUBJECT: ELITE'S REACTION TO MAY 21 REFERENDUM

1. REACTION OF EDUCATED EGYPTIANS TO SADAT'S MANNER OF CRACKING DOWN ON CRITICS (ALTHOUGH NOT NECESSARILY TO CRACKDOWN ITSELF) UNDER MAY 21 REFERENDUM HAS BEEN ALMOST UNIVERSALLY NEGATIVE. WHILE REACTION IS UNDERSTANDABLE FROM LEFTISTS, WAFDISTS AND OTHERS AT WHOM MEASURES DIRECTED, MODERATES AND HIGH-RANKING MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT ALSO CRITICAL. MAJOR CRITICISMS ARE: (A) NEITHER LEFTISTS NOR WAFDISTS PRESENTED REAL THREAT TO SADAT GOVERNMENT; (B) WHILE SOME OF LEFTIST CHARGES AGAINST GOE WERE IRRESPONSIBLE AND MOTIVATED BY PURELY PARTISAN INTEREST, OTHERS WERE JUSTIFIED AND PART- AND-PARCEL OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY; (C) REFERENDUM IS APPLICATION OF EX POST FACTO LAW. LEFTISTS ARGUE THEY HAD NOT VIOLATED EXISTING LAWS, OTHERWISE REFERENDUM WOULD HAVE BEEN UNNECESSARY. SADAT HAS SHOWN HE HAS POWER TO CARRY
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COUNTRY WITH HIM AGAINST OPPONENTS, BUT BY DEMONSTRATING AUTOCRATIC POWER, HE MADE SHAM OF CLAIM TO "STATE OF INSTITUTIONS" AND "RULE OF LAW". IF MORE REPRESSIVE MEASURES NEEDED IN FUTURE, PRECEDENT OF A POPULAR REFERENDUM TO LEGITIMIZE THEM IS NOW FIRMLY ESTABLISHED; AND (D) SADAT HAS HURT HIS IMAGE ABROAD AS LIBERAL LEADER AND UNDERMINED ONE OF TWO PILLARS OF HIS WIDE POPULAR SUPPORT

(OTHER BEING PEACE INITIATIVE).

2. COMMENT: ABOVE ARE VIEWS OF EDUCATED ELITE, WHO ALSO BLAME WHAT THEY CONSIDER SADAT'S "OVER-REACTION" ON-PM SALEM AND SECURITY AUTHORITIES. HOWEVER, THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THESE VIEWS ARE SHARED BY MASS OF EGYPTIANS WHO AUTOMATICALLY TEND TO SUPPORT THEIR PRESIDENT. IT MAY WELL BE THAT SALEM ET AL HAVE MUCH BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO ASSURE STABILITY. IN OUR VIEW, SADAT WILL SUCCEED IN CURBINB HIS OPPONENTS AND STIFLING CRITICISM IN THE SHORT RUN, BUT IN THE LONGER TERM HE RUNS RISK OF UNDERMINING POPULAR SUPPORT HE HAS ENJOYED FROM ALL BUT HIS MOST DETERMINED CRITICS. MATTHEWS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC ATTITUDES, REFERENDUMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978CAIRO13873
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780226-1004
Format: TEL
From: CAIRO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978059/aaaaahbk.tel
Line Count: 76
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 30cfcba3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2781246
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ELITE'S REACTION TO MAY 21 REFERENDUM
TAGS: PINT, EG
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/30cfcba3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014